

Present from AHC

Bilal Ansari, Charles Bonenti, Van Ellet, Cheryl Shanks, Cathy Yamamoto (chair)

Present from Higher Ground

Overlap: Bilal Ansari, Van Ellet, Cathy Yamamoto; also Penny Devereux, Robin Lenz, Harry Matthews, Brian O'Grady, Susan Puddester, Ron Turbin

Also present:

Rita Farrell (Massachusetts Housing Partnership)
Peter Fohlin (Town Manager)
Megan Foley (North Adams Transcript)
Olivia Wang (Williams student)

Business

Williams College has been willing to discuss with Higher Ground the possibility of HG's acquiring College property in the vicinity of Proprietor's Fields/Cole playing fields for the development of new affordable housing, and Higher Ground has received a \$20,000 grant from LISC to investigate site(s). The town's Affordable Housing Committee separately received \$107,500 of CPA funds for technical services in support of projects that could overlap with/include this site's development.

Issue for discussion

How ought the two groups to coordinate or sequence their work so as to use all resources most efficiently in ways that serve their complementary but somewhat separate missions?

Decisions specific to Higher Ground/LISC grant/College site

1. The letter attached to the \$20,000 grant uses the term "replacement housing" and mentions disaster displacement, but by the time that any development on that site was habitable, it would likely have to be open to a wider array of tenants and not constitute disaster or replacement housing. The terms of the grant therefore need to be clarified.

2. The best use of the \$20,000 would appear to be acquiring as much information as possible about the College's site's accessibility, then legal characteristics (wetlands, zoning, legal fire zone requirements, etc.), then topography and vertical characteristics that affect what can be built and where. Town personnel, who are effectively free, are insufficiently specialized, so someone would have to be hired for this.

3. \$20,000 is probably enough only to do these tasks, in sequence, for this site.

Decisions about HG-AHC coordination

The AHC is starting with more basic and comprehensive questions about the population(s) to be served, their relative priority, and long-term planning as well as housing needs. Following the scope of services model that MHP provided, the AHC technical consultants would generate demographic/economic background information first, then consider multiple private and public sites, and nondevelopment options, second. They would only then go on to recommending a site/approach, investigating funding, and coming up with possible models.

1. Depending on the timing, the AHC might be too far behind HG to have an effect, positive or negative; or it might be able to include the College site as one of several for its own consultant to evaluate.
2. Coordination is constrained somewhat by the fact that the AHC, as a town committee, is subject to the state's open meeting laws, quorum rules, and laws about soliciting bids; its funds are also bound to be used for the purposes indicated on the CPA warrant at town meeting. One of its members will also sit on the Trust, and in that capacity have a say in disbursing funds. As a non-profit organization, HG has several advantages. It is not constrained by meeting and acquisition rules, for example, nor even by village or state borders.

Decisions specific to the Affordable Housing Committee

1. Rather than finish drafting the consultant letter, Bilal and Cheryl will bring to next meeting a comprehensive rough draft that includes everything, and the committee members can use it to decide what to ask of our first consultant.
2. We already miss Kim Burnham, who resigned from the committee.

Next Meeting: Thursday, August 16, 7:00 pm, Town Hall